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North Carolina A&T State University
School of Agriculture and
Environmental Sciences
Newsletter
www.ag.ncat.edu

April 2012 • Vol. XI, No. 2

Beatty Bunch brings 2012 Small Farm Award to Bladen County



Bladen County farmers Albert (center), Ada and Sonya Beatty (r) of AA&S Farms Inc., are the 2012 N.C. Small Farmers of the Year.

When it comes to trees, the poet Alfred Joyce Kilmer may have some competition from Bladen County farmer Albert Beatty. Kilmer wrote about the loveliness of trees and poems, and how God distinguished between them. Beatty, a third generation farmer and the recent recipient of the N.C. 2012 Small Farmer of the Year, dotes on his loblolly and long-leaf pines like children he's nurtured, raised and sent out into the world.

"This is my pride and joy," Beatty says, beaming up at stand of loblolly skyscrapers he planted on a tract that he bought 34 years ago.

For his stewardship over 315 acres of pine forest, and for innovations in the various uses of those trees — including saw lumber, pulp, pine straw and kindling — as well as for innovations in his beef cattle and confined swine operation, Beatty was honored last month by The Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T. The 26th Annual N.C. Small

Farmer of the Year award was formally bestowed on AA&S Farms Inc., which comprises Beatty, president; his wife Ada, secretary-treasurer; and daughter and vice president, Sonya — the actual adult child that Beatty also dotes on.

The Beattys operate a diverse small farm that includes the forestland, as well as 73 acres devoted to vegetable and animal production. Their farmstead in Harrells includes two confined swine barns, each designed to nurture 1,530 feeder pigs that come to AA&S at 15 days old and stay for exactly seven weeks before they're sent on to their next stop. Beatty uses the pig waste nutrients to fertilize his cattle pastures, an irrigation practice that reduces the farm's use of commercial fertilizer.

The Beattys recently began raising goats after county Extension farm management agents Nelson Brownlee and James Hartsfield — of Bladen-Robeson

Extension and Sampson-Duplin Extension, respectively — helped the family apply for a producer grant. The goats not only help to diversify AA&S's farm operation and generate income, but through rotational grazing help reduce the amount of weeds on the farm and therefore the amount of chemicals needed for weed control. Likewise, A&T's plasticulture program — through which crops are grown on plastic mulch with drip irrigation — helped the Beattys increase their vegetable production.

And once Beatty learned from A&T's Grace Summers how to operate the plastic mulch layer and lay the plastic, Beatty quickly shared what he had learned with the N.C. Coalition of Farms and Rural Families. The coalition purchased its own equipment, which Beatty then helped refit so that it worked for smaller rows, and he set out to work.

"I've worked with 55 farms and went from Roanoke Rapids almost to Danville, Virginia, putting down that plastic," Beatty says.

Using plasticulture helped the Beattys produce crops that grew earlier, lasted longer, and required less weeding. The vegetables got a constant source of water through drip irrigation, which Beatty describes as an "IV, like you get in the hospital."

Beatty has a way with words, but it's his attention to trees that's at the root of his small farm's success. His father, James A. Beatty, modeled reverence for the land's pine trees. Trees were never incorporated into fence building — as at many other farms — because the elder Beatty never wanted a

nail in a pine tree. Nor were pines ever used for firewood.

"My father, in his way, was very conservative with pine trees," says Beatty, 67. "At the time, pines were the only ones that had value down here. Oaks and maples had no value."

Money may not exactly grow on trees, but the Beattys are becoming expert at extracting money from them. Pines traditionally make good choices for lumber, because of their length and height, and with the Beattys' agroforestry know-how, they're also using other parts — from branches, down to needles. It's an investment that is paying off now and the Beattys hope that 40 years from now their daughter Sonya will still benefit from the saplings that are being planted.

From the family's water-front property along the South River, Beatty recounts buying the 85-acre tract in 1978 — a decade after he returned from Vietnam. Everything was flat, little more than a field. Beatty planted pines. By 1990, their growth was so abundant that Beatty had to have the trees thinned. Then last year Beatty had a grove of the towering trees clear cut, forgoing his pilgrimage to A&T for the 2011 Small Farmers Appreciation Day activities because he didn't want to miss witnessing the culmination of a story that was 33 years in the making.

"I wanted to be here. We started from scratch with these trees," Beatty says. "It's been like a 401-K. This is my 401-Tree, a good investment."

Brace for impact!

1890 scientists come together to solve big issues

For more than 100 years, N.C. A&T and its 17 sister institutions in the 1890 land-grant university network have made a difference in each of the 17 southeastern and border states that they serve.

Now, scientists at these institutions are teaming up to make more enduring impacts on the national stage. More than 80 ag scientists from the 1890s began the process in March at a Consortium Scientists Meeting, convened by the Association of Research Directors, which is the umbrella organization of the 1890s. The SAES hosted and facilitated the meeting, at the request of ARD.

"This represents a better, more coordinated approach to what we've been doing individually," said Dean William Randle of the SAES in a welcoming address to the meeting. "As a group we can be powerful and that's what this consortium is designed to be."

Other leaders from ARD explained that the new trend in research funding is toward multi-million-dollar awards for large projects that solve big problems fac-

ing society as a whole. That approach to problem solving demands expertise and synergies that can only arise from many disciplines and from a team approach, which is why ARD is now encouraging the new paradigm, ARD leaders say.

"We figure we can come up with some amazing impacts if we work together," said Dr. Carolyn Brooks, executive director of ARD.

Consortium scientists proved up to the task. They formed five teams, and at the end of the three-day meeting, had come up with a working plan to develop grant proposals by April 30 that address these far-reaching issues important to both rural and urban America:

- Foodborne illness outbreak prevention
- Energy independence and security
- Obesity prevention
- Increasing enrollment in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, agriculture and math)
- Agricultural production systems for small farmers

The ARD leadership will submit the proposals to an independent third party for review, and then award the winning proposal a seed grant of up to \$100,000. That grant will then be used by the researchers to gather preliminary data for writing and developing an ambitious, far-reaching research grant proposal for submission to large funding agencies, such as the National Institutes of Health or the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative.

One of the most valuable outcomes of the meeting — relationships — might be impossible to ever measure, but possibly the most worthwhile of all, observed Dr. Shirley Hymon-Parker, associate dean for research for the SAES.

"Strong working relationships were developed, and that was wonderful," she said. "The group I was in, which was obesity prevention, really bonded. Participants in all the groups went away energized, hopeful, and ready to make this happen."



Albert Beatty's innovative strategies for livestock production were part of the portfolio that helped his AA&S Farms harvest the 2012 Small Farmers of the Year Award.



At the 2012 Small Farmers Appreciation Luncheon, Leonard Jordan gave a keynote address that looked at small-scale agriculture from a perspective hinged to a 35-year career with USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Grace Summers, an Extension associate, introduces a young consumer to poultry production.



Small Farms Week

Quotes

"Since you're here, maybe some of you politicians can do something about this – and that is keep the agriculture in our schools, because that's how I learned it. With kids, if they're not exposed to it, they're not going to do it."

2011 Small Farmer of the Year, **Thomas Pierce** at SFW Kickoff in Jamesville

"The beauty of our agricultural system is that the food is always coming. It's on a truck. It's on a train. It's on a ship.... But we might need to think more about a local food system. To change it, we need to think about what we can grow seasonally."

Dr. John O'Sullivan, SFW Kickoff in Jamesville

"We are here to help you do what you do better, making sure you have access to the latest agricultural innovations that not only exist on this campus, but encompass the entire land-grant university system."

Chancellor Harold L. Martin Sr., at the Small Farmers Appreciation Luncheon

"You may be called small farmers but we recognize that you have big dreams.... We have every confidence that our agents and assistants will translate that dream into action for you."

Dr. M. Ray McKinnie, associate dean and administrator for The Cooperative Extension Program, at Small Farmers Appreciation Luncheon

"The truth is, every citizen of North Carolina is part of agriculture because they eat every day."

Steve Troxler, N.C. Commissioner of Agriculture, at Small Farmers Appreciation Luncheon



Dr. Antoine Alston

Dr. Antoine Alston has been named the SAES's interim associate dean for Academic Studies. A faculty member since 2000, Alston was the 2010 recipient of the Annual Award for Excellence in Teaching from the University of North Carolina Board of Governors. That same year, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture presented Alston an Award for Excellence in College and University Teaching in the Food and Agricultural Sciences. Alston earned his bachelor's and master's from A&T, and his doctorate from Iowa State University.



Dr. Carinthia Cherry

Dr. Carinthia Cherry has joined The Cooperative Extension Program as a nutrition specialist. Cherry earned bachelor's degrees in biology and chemistry from Elizabeth City State University, a master's in food science from A&T, and a doctorate in nutrition from UNC-Greensboro. A native of Bertie County in northeast North Carolina, Cherry is also a registered dietitian.

Dr. Anne-Marie Gloster has been named coordinator for the Expanded Foods and Nutrition Program for The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T. Gloster was previously a professor of nutrition at UNC-Greensboro, and she has been active in efforts to tighten connections between agriculture and local consumers. Gloster is a registered dietitian, and she holds degrees in food science, public health nutrition and educational leadership from N.C. State University and UNC-Chapel Hill.



Eliza MacLean leads a tour of her Cane Creek Farm that was part of a Small Farms Week educational forum.

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North Carolina A&T State University School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences Newsletter — *Produced by the Agricultural Communications and Technology Unit*

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on the *move*/flip side



U.S. Rep. Mel Watt visited in mid-March with Larry Hartsfield, A&T's USDA liaison officer, and some of the SAES's 1890 scholars — high-caliber students for whom USDA is providing full tuition and fees, and summer employment with a USDA agency as they work toward their bachelor's degrees.

mark your calendars:

- The SAES Student Awards Banquet for the 2011–12 academic year is Thursday, April 12 at 7 p.m. in the Memorial Student Union Building.
- A&T State University's Spring commencement — at which First Lady Michelle Obama will deliver the address — is Saturday, May 12.

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